OUR HISTORY

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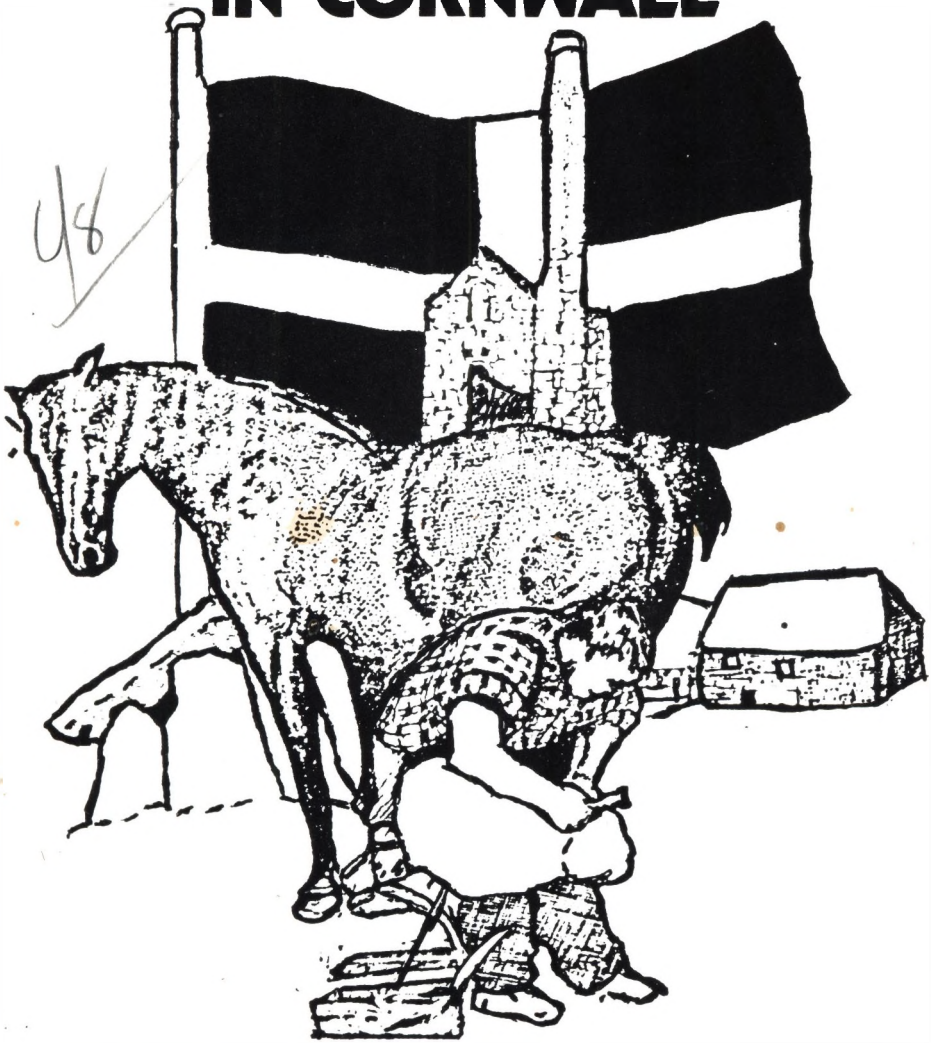
THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN CORNWALL



A HISTORICAL REVIEW BY ROYSTON GREEN

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In the next issue Heather Jordan will examine South Wales during the General Strike of 1842.

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1. Cornwall and the National Question

The nationalities of the British Isles, including the Cornish, possess specific characteristics which may only be understood, assessed and related to contemporary political tasks in the light of a sustained analysis of their origin and development.

If we are talking about nationality in terms of a politically organised cohesion of culture, language and economy, then the Cornish nationality predates that of either the Scots, the Irish, the Bretons or the Welsh. In the aftermath of the Roman occupation, there emerged in the south-west peninsula of Britain a Celtic-speaking society, professing Christianity, no longer of purely tribal clan organisation, economically primitive but with rudimentary monarchical and feudal institutions. This political existence was sustained for nearly five centuries after the Saxon advent in Kent. Even after the establishment of the English and then Norman overlordship, separate forms of administrative and religious organisation continued to the 16th century. Kernewek, the distinct Cornish variety of Brythonic Celtic languages, did not begin its westward retreat as a mass language until the onset of English state centralisation in the 16th and 17th centuries.

Examining the circumstances in which the eclipse of the Cornish language took place, it becomes clear that is was closely associated with, if not caused by, a deliberate and violent extirpation of a distinct Cornish political economy, a forfeiture of landownership, and the destruction of social relationships, which took place on a scale comparable with that in Ireland a little later. In 1497 and again in 1549 two armed revolts were directly led from Cornwall and were only subdued after fierce fighting. During the English Revolution in the 1640's Cornwall's involvement, though only contributory, still had quite specific national roots and the defeat of the Royalist cause, which Cornwall had to share, completed the process of disintegration.

In the following century and a half, during the industrial revolution, Cornwall became a major site for mineral extraction. The tin, zinc and copper used in Britain's industrialisation were principally drawn from Cornwall, and at its height, in the 1830's, Cornwall was producing 53% of the world's copper. The resulting demand for labour helped push the country's population to 360,000 by the mid-nineteenth century. However Cornwall's part in this mineral production remained almost entirely extractive. When Cornish mining started to become less economic in the face in the face of American and other producers in the second half of the nineteenth century, there were no secondary metal industries to take up the slack. From 1861 population declined with mass emigration of miners. Cornwall thereby became the only area within the British Isles, apart from Ireland, to witness not just depopulation but a measure of de-industrialisation in the period when industrial development elsewhere was consolidated. What is today called the de-industrialisation of Britain under the Common Market and the multinationals is Cornwall's second de-industrialisation.

Consequently today, despite all the adverse effects which wider capitalist development has had on Cornwall, the organised working class movement remains weak and isolated. Trade union membership is low. The Labour Party, although it held one parliamentary seat in the 1960's, usually came third to the Liberals and the Conservatives during the 1970's. The decline of mining and industry in the later 19th century, during just those years when organised labour politics were developing elsewhere, meant that the cultural and political traditions of working people in Cornwall never fully crystallized into political identity with organised labour. More recently, the continuation of very small enterprise in the shadow of a service-oriented economy and vociferous tourism has further reinforced this position and it is not surprising that, in these circumstances, Cornish traditions should still be most actively used by those who consider that an independent Cornwall would secure the interests of the small proprietor, notwithstanding the strength of monopoly capitalism.

Hence the importance of the national question for socialists in Cornwall - of the need to develop an understanding that can draw out the socially progressive content of Cornwall's national traditions and reveal that trend which embodies the struggles of working people against all forms of exploitation. If this is not done, it is easy for those who wish to divide and confuse working people, both inside and outside Cornwall, to advance quite spurious racial notions of Cornish nationality. Such notions, it scarcely needs adding, actively conceal the real, historically based nature of Cornish nationality. They serve to deny the fact that Cornish nationality, like any other, was forged socially, in an environment of developing property relations, class and exploitation and that Cornish nationality represented, at each stage, a common understanding of social relationships which people could, in the mass and as embodied in culture, be mobilised to defend.

The object of this study is therefore to help discover this lost history and identify those elements in Cornish tradition which embody the class aspirations of working people to control their own destiny. We will examine in turn the wider origins of Cornish culture within the semi - communal society of the Celts and the

forces which produced a separate Cornish Celtic state in the post - Roman period. We will examine its subordination first to the Saxons and later to the Normans and in particular the process by which the working people of Cornwall, the gweryn, continued their resistance in the face of higher forms of exploitation - and did so while their erstwhile rulers, the men of property, assimilated themselves to, and used for their own ends, external institutions of exploitation. For this is something which stands out in Cornish experience. Long after the extinction of the independent free miner and the destruction of Cornish custom in landholding - with its high proportion of free peasants and semi - corporate, elective parish institutions - it seems that the social relationships involved were carried forward in new forms by the increasingly dispossessed rural population.1 The relationships found in Cornish mining , and to an extent in fishing, preserved the elements of co - operative internal organisation and resistance to a direct wage relationship.

2. Celtic Origins

Splendid is the synoptic study of the Celts, from their half - glimpsed origins, through a heyday when they stretched in an arc of broad extent from Spain to Turkey and were in 390 BC bought off by the city of Rome, to the only independent states they had after Roman times, their containment by the English and French states, their refusal in modern times willingly to surrender their ancient culture and their own contribution to capitalism by labour. administration, art, invention, ideological understanding and organisation. 2. No Celtic country can be properly understood without this synoptic view.

There is no doubt that the Normans discovered remaining aspects of primitive communism when they began to use their newly acquired English kingdom for further penetration in the British Isles. It is important to emphasise this because it is central to our understanding of the subsequent conquests and of the tenacious resistance, spread over centuries, to the alteration of the socio - economic basis of Celtic communities.

It is generally agreed that the first Celtic speech could not have reached these islands later than the beginning of the Iron Age. Over a period of two thousand years Cornwall's population received an admixture from Galicia, Northern Portugal and from Armorica - Brittany, amongst various sources. 3. Hallstadt influences came from Galicia and these were overlapped and followed by La Tene influence from Armorica. 3 Cornwall had more of the P variety of Celtic speech, the stem of modern Welsh, and, it seems, little of the K, parent of Irish Gaelic. 4 The fine burnished Iron Age A pottery and some Bronze Age sherds associated at Bodrifty suggest a mingling of peoples, with the possibility of Celtic and non - Celtic speech at one side; 5 if so, this would be one more piece of evidence against the existence of any pure genetic chain required by racial theories of Cornish origins. Tin enters recorded history as a link with the Mediterranean, first through Carthagians and then through the visit of Pytheas the Greek to people ' friendly and civilised with trade '.6

About 200BC South West Britain was overrun by people in contact with the advanced La Tene civilisation of the Marne. The pottery of Chysauster Iron Age

village indicates greater influence of Iron Age over Bronze Age people than further north in Britain. 7 The famous lake villages of Meare and Glastonbury can be regarded as flourishing outposts of the south - western B culture as well as centres of Iron Age commerce in their own right. They were founded probably in the fourth or third century BC by colonists who arrived by way of the river Brue and the Bristol channel .... .8 These sites represented at that time Britains most advanced civilisation with which have been associated Cornish sites at Rumps Point, Goldherring and the ditch with Iron Age B pottery on Tingagel Head. 9 The colonising, maritime and commercial Veneti of Armorica are seen in the promontory forts or cliff castles. Of these Trevelgue compares with Llantwit major and the triple rampart of Gurnards Head with the structure of Breton and Cork forts. There were multiple enclosure forts like Resugga, which seem to be defended dwellings of chieftains and their kin. The Rounds, perhaps of Bronze Age origin, defended hamlets and homesteads of kin groups - as at Castle Gotha - and had associated cattle herding communities. 10 As well as the Rounds there exists also a hedge system (field boundaries of stone cleared from the ground and set with earth in which was found the Bronze Age Towednack hoard. This hoard - perhaps three thousand years old - indicates the incredible antiquity of the Cornish landscape. 11

At the end of the Iron Age and the onset of the Roman occupation, the inhabit - ants of these various settlements, a mixture of intruders and Bronze Age survivors were known by the name **Dumnonii**. Closer analysis may trace back the origin of later folk tradition to this period. Caesar noted that the Britons had a hare taboo - it existed across Europe - and elements of this would seem to be found in the 19th century Polperro witch story. 12 The rite of the last swathe is still repeated each autumn. The hurling at St. Columb Major and the Silver Ball at St. Ives may contain reference to the ritual drama of opposing tribes as contradic - tory forces. Carew writing between 1575 and 1600 associated hurling with horses (a Celtic sacred animal) and the hunted ball with some strange spirit power. 13

The Romans overran the Dumnonian peninsula about 47 AD, and established their headquarters at Isca Dumnoniorum (Exeter), a previous tribal capital, and this remained the nearest urban settlement to Cornwall until the 11th century. Within Roman Dumnonia, Cornwall formed a **pagus** or rural unit. 14

Tin was an early interest of the Romans and the rectangular earthworks at Nanstallon, Bosence and near Probus may be related to the production and transport of this commodity. Later, production in Spain reduced the prosperity of Cornish mining, but by 250 A.D., fear of an exhaustion of the empire's supplies brought state intervention and tin production increased. 15 By and large, however, the tribal area of the Dumnonii was relatively insignificant and backward in Roman times and without an advanced urban or villa ecohomy. Excavated buildings are fairly few. Cornwall's only villa is at Magor (**ruin** in Cornish), an enigmatic sub-rectangular building of about 150 A.D. Goldherring provides a large farm of poss-ibly Iron Age ancestry which dates from the 1st to 4th centuries and which has an oval ditched enclosure. The much visited village of courtyard houses at Chysauster is one of a number concentrated in West Penwith together with **fogous**, artificial caves of controversial function.

The nearest Roman road yet discovered is north west of Exeter, and the place

name Stratton may indicate a road entering Cornwall across the infant Tamar. 16 There are also suggestions of a route skirting the north side of Bodmin Moor, continuing along the spine of Cornwall to St. Day and then on to Mount's Bay. 17 It is possible that the future will see much more disclosed about Roman Cornwall.

3. Origins of the Cornish Kingdom

It is in the final phase of Roman rule, that of provincial disintegration, external attack and internal military revolt, that we must seek the origins of the Cornish Kingdom. In the face of raids from the Irish, Picts and Saxons, first between 250 and 300 and again after 350, the urban core of Romano-Britain started to decay. The emphasis shifted to well-defended, self-supporting manorial units in the countryside. 18 In areas like Cornwall, where villa life had always been weak, there was some reversion to pre-Roman tribal patterns, and indeed such areas, where some tribal cohesion remained, proved particularly important for raising the federates, a new type of clan-based defence force, which played a key role in the last century of Roman rule.

In this period marked by it perpetual succession of usurping military emperors, Britain - with its large frontier garrisons and its Romanised tribal cohorts - became a major base for such attempts. Albinus in 193, Carausius (286/7 - 293), Constantine the Great in 312, Magnentius (350 - 353), Magnus Maximus (383 - 387), Marcus and Gratian in 406 and Constantine (406 - 410) all started from Britain. 19 Of particular importance we may note the military power base built up in western Britain by the officers from Spain under Count Theodosius in 368 to halt raiding by the Irish. 20 Theodosius rebuilt the fort called Segontium on the Menai Straits. It was one of Theodosius's Spanish officers, Magnus Maximus, who, after the defeat of the emperor Valentinian at Adrianople in 378, was later proclaimed emperor by his troops in Britain and, after consolidating his position, crossed into Gaul in 383. He was recognised by Theodosius the Great as emperor of Britain, Gaul and Spain. This he remained until 387, when, crossing the Alps, he was defeated and beheaded. 21

Subsequently, Maximus became a central figure in legend - in Cornish as Massen (in the 'Bewnans Memasek') and in Welsh as Maxen Wledig (in the 'Mabinogion'). Here he appears as a man drawn in a dream pursuit of a princess Helena to Caer Seint (Segontium). Helena was also the name of the wife of Constantine the Great. On the eve of the battle of the Milvian bridge, after Constantine had left Britain to capture imperial power, he had a vision of a white cross on a black ground. 22 There is a story that this symbol was put on a covering for dead Cornish rebels by their comrades in the 1549 rebellion and was associated with miners andSt. Piran Hence Constantine's Cross is claimed as the original of the **Crows Wyn** or St.Pirancross. This conflation of Massen and Constantine the Great is further overlaid in subsequent legend with memories of Constantine the usurper and the latter's ally-general in Spain, Gerontius. 23 The names of Constantine and Gerontius are conspicuous in the post-Roman Dumnonian-Cornish dynasty and certain Cornish village and place names.

Why did Celtic tradition select Maximus from other imperial usurpers ? Perhaps it was because he was of sufficient standing at the myth making period, whereas the great Carausius was too early ; more certainly because of the time and care he was able to spend building his political base in Britain before he left for Gaul - in particular the way he secured the frontiers by developing a system of tribal **federates**.Such reorganisation delegated elements of imperial authority to the old clan structure and is closely linked with the wider changes which have been going on within the western empire for theprevious half century. These changes, stemming from a change - over from a centralised slave society to one based on localised peasant - landlord relations, had demanded a near feudal decentralisation of power to provincial magnates and gave the Christian religion a central role as the new, socially integrating ideology which embraced both the freed slave and his landlord master. The old indigenous native languages were now taken over by the latinised gentry and became the new vernaculars.

In Cornwall it is from this period of clan revival that we first find the indigenous tribe the Durocornovii (marked west of the Tamar on the Ravenna Cosmography) 24 reported as acting militarily as federates; defending Caithness, Viroconium (Wroxeter) and Armorica (Brittany). 25 **The Notitia Dignitatam Occidens** places Cohors 1 Cornoviorum on Hadrians Wall. 26

Hence in Maximus - Maxen - Massen we may be able to see a new Celtic legitimacy emerging from the experience of the Roman state and embodied in a single historically - founded but mythical personality linked with rulers and states claiming to be British heirs to Rome. Maxen can clearly be seen as proto - Arthurian. 27

In the frontier areas of Britain like Cornwall and Wales the revival of clan elements seems to have been particularly strong and to have left a powerful imprint on subsequent institutions notably the Celtic church. Jack Lindsay has related the internal political and religious turmoil of these years the conflict between Romanised landlords (the magnates) and the newly powerful clan leaders. He presents the clash of Ambosius and Vortigern and, in the religious field, that between St. Germanus and Pelagius, in this light. 28 Equally we may see the same forces at work in the emerging differences between the Roman church and the Celtic. Monastically - organised with a plethora of saints, the Celtic church seems to represent an accomadation with the pre - existing structures of the clan. The Druidic order had traditionally taken its members from the younger sons of the royal segments, and now many of the founding saints of the new church were similarly drawn from royal or chiefly families. Like the Druidic colleges it was organised in small monastic communities - not in the diocese structure of the Roman church which closely followed the divisions of landlord power. Indeed Magnus Maximus, in building his base among the clan federates, may have been instrumental in facilitating the spread of monastic forms of asceticism to Britain, and is certainly known to have been in contact with one of the main proponents of contemporary monasticism, St.Martin of Tours. 29

As centralised Roman power finally gave way at the beginning of the fifth century, the geographical orientation of Cornwall shifted west. Discoveries of amphorae and other pottery show that trade, in so far as it existed, now passed down the

Atlantic sea routes to the Mediterranean and linked Cornwall in common contacts with Brittany, Ireland, Wales and the west coast of Scotland. 30 Movements of population reinforced this new orientation. The fifth century saw substantial Irish settlement of parts of Wales and Cornwall until perhaps the seventh century. The names of two Irish settlements in Cornwall are found in the Glossary of Cormac and link with disturbances in Ireland related in the ' Saga of the Wanderings of the Deisse.' 31

At the same time there was a major shift of population from Cornwall southwards to Brittany taking with it the Brythonic dialect developed in South West Britain and called Cornu-Breton by scholars. 32 This emigration, which led to the foundation of the Breton state, may have represented a reaction to Irish raids or an exodus by magnate elements to an area already patrolled by their own federates and where the defeat of the rebellious Bacaudae now offered the prospect of more settled peasant society. 33

In Cornwall itself there is some evidence of a greater emphasis on cattle rearing as a result of Irish settlement.34 Porthmeor courtyard village and Goldherring were abandoned in favour of defended hamlets. 35 Disused Iron Age forts were taken over as bases for chiefly power.36 The first gifts of land were made to the de-centralised Celtic church, still traceable today in the raised territory of many churchyards, and significantly these were circular in shape and no longer the Roman rectilinear. 37 Such **lans**, or monastic enclosures, probably had the following sequence of development: sub-Roman inscriptions on stones, a small shrine (later chancel) for a missionary priest celebrating before open air congregations, a wooden shelter for the congregation (later nave) and perhaps one of the earlier Celtic crosses. The proto-chancel and proto-nave were from about 700 A.D. replaced by a rough-hewn stone structure with the inscribed stone inbuilt. 38 Radford considers the inscribed stones not only include the dynasties of chiefs but a whole class who were beginning a lord relationship with serfs. He points out that the earliest Welsh native missionaries were those whom later Welsh custom terms **uchelwyr**, lords or possessors of the lower freemen. 39 As the war chief's hearth companions were rewarded with land, tribal links yielded to feudal obligations controlled by the king. Lords of innumerable villages appear long before the 7th century ends and the beginnings of a manorial economy are visible.40

The fact that such developments were possible - under Celtic control - was ensured by some form of decisive military check to westward Saxon advance between 490 and 516. 41 Arthur himself is first mentioned in the Gododdin. This poem, a lament for a great defeat at Catterick (Yorkshire) dates from around 600 and is the oldest literary text in any European language apart from Latin or Greek. 42 It gives the first reference to the Dumnonian-Cornish king Gereint (Gerontius) who was in the defeated Celtic federation. Arthur was not of kingly status; in the Welsh texts he is never **gwledig** (prince) but **amherdawr** (imperator in Latin).43 In the **Triads of Arthur** he is described as 'chief lord of Kelliwic in Cornwall', and the **Mabinogion** in its tale of Kulwch and Olwen, says, 'then went Arthur to Cellewic in Cornwall'. While Kelliwic has not been identified (it could be Kellybury, Gweek or Callington), Arthur was clearly one of the newly emerging provincial lords. 44

Kingly or monarchical power, with its directly inherited and feudal character, marked a decisive break with the clan practice, and it seems to have emerged in the late fifth century. 45 The tyrant Teudaris is remembered in the miracle play **Bewnans Meryasek**, the **Lives** of four saints and place names like Lestowder (court of Tudor) in St. Keverne. The British chronicler Gildas (516 - 570) records King Constantine of Cornwall as the 'tyrannical whelp of the unclean lioness Dumnonia' - the 'tyrannical' may refer to power won, not inherited. Excavations have revealed a large timber hall dating to this period within the deserted Iron Age fort of Castle Dore near the stone inscribed **Drustanus** etc. (Tristan?). 46 Was it the territory of Tristan, Isolde and King Mark, those legendary figures of medieval romance?

This period of petty Celtic kingdoms stretching from Cornwall through Wales to Cumbria and Clydeside was finally brought to an end by the Saxon victory of Dyrham in 577, placing a wedge of conquered territory between the British South West and Wales. Dumnonia stemmed the power of Wessex for another century but was eventually driven back river by river until the kingdom was reduced to the present boundaries of Cornwall by 700. At the beginning of the 8th century the Cornish church, like the Ionan church in the north, conformed with Roman practice and thenceforth petitions are addressed to 'saints, martyrs, angels and the Virgin Mary'. 47 Throughout that century, however, the integrity of a separate Cornish kingdom was maintained, and after 800 the Cornish were able to buttress their position by alliances with the Vikings. A combined army of Cornish and Norsemen was defeated at Hingston Down near Callington by Egbert of Wessex in 835. 48 Later the military eclipse of the Vikings in the 900s opened the way for the complete subjugation of the kingdom of Cornwall, and, after the defeat of another combined army at Boleit (the date may have been either 925 or 936) the Cornish monarchy was terminated and the boundary of the new province was fixed on the Tamar. Cornish cultural life was shouldered aside, and, according to Henderson, what remained of clan forms of landownership ended. 49 The mid-tenth century Bodmin manumissions, or freeing of slaves at the altar of St. Petroc show that the slaves had mainly Cornish names and the owners mainly English ones. These names, a calendar with Cornish words and a seven page vocabulary, occupy the margins and blank spaces of the Bodmin Gospels, sometimes said to be of Breton provenance. This is the earliest extant Kernewek or Cornish.

So, in summing up these crucial five hundred years, in which the basis was laid for a distinct Cornish national identity, we may observe the following features.

First, post-Roman Cornish society was not a **simple** reversion to clan tribalism. The Celtic speech was preserved and cultural links developed with clan society in Ireland but Cornish society was now, first and foremost, a monarchical christian society - albeit a primitive one. The old pattern, found in Ireland, of the election of chiefs from among the chiefly families by warrior freemen, did not properly re-develop in post-Roman times. Clan cohesion had been too far broken up by a new political economy based on inherited possession of land. Instead, within the frame-work of a partially revived Celtic culture, we find the attempted legitimation of a hereditary royal succession and the establishment of noble families as their land-holding dependents. Undoubtably, an element of clan patronage did survive at local level - but the system itself was no longer clan based.

Second, however, we must note that this Cornish kingdom was not **fully** feudal. It seems unlikely, in view of later evidence, that the peasant population was in any way uniformly enserfed or directly bound to the soil. The constant military struggle against invaders made it necessary to build up an ideologically-based cohesion within a very mixed and mobile population of refugees, ex-slaves and magnate dependents, and it is here that the religious and secular myths of the Celtic saints and Arthur must have found their continuing function. Pivotal to this process, the bridge between old and new, was the Cornish church. Drawing, in its monasticism on the old semi-royal druidic order, it also sanctified through its network of propertied shrines and chapels the new tribute relationships within settled rural communities. The church gave literary expression to Kernewek and some pagan material suggests a bardic tradition incompletely extinguished. This heritage, as we will see in our examination of the feudal period, was a potent one, and involved at least some recognition of relative peasant freedoms.

4. Feudal Cornwall

Two sharply distinguished phases can be discerned within the feudal period in Cornwall; a comparatively short - lived phase of Saxon colonisation from the 930s to the 1050s, and then four centuries of advanced Norman and Plantagenet feudalism in which emphasis was shifted decisively from colonisation to commercial exploitation.

The years of Saxon colonisation saw a definate attempt to end the cultural and linguistic base of the old Cornish kingdom. The Celtic church underwent a century's material and organisational erosion and in 1050 the see was transferred to Exeter. We also have the first case of the establishment of canons to replace the older monastic order, a process which signifies Roman discipline as against Celtic tradition. 50 Place names suggest that Cornish ceased to be spoken in the heavily Saxonised east and north - east Cornwall - although one calculation of Celtic place-names extant in 1900 gave both Cornwall and Ireland about 80%. 51 There also seems to have been a degree of anglicisation and assimilation among Cornish landowners. In 969 King Edgar gave two **mansa**e and a **pertica** at Lamorran and Trenowth in Probus to Aelfeah ,Gerent and Morweri his wife (both last names being Cornish) The manumissions list 24 of the masters with Celtic names and only five with Saxon names. The two sets of names may indicate the tendency of class survival of Celtic chiefs. No doubt the non - assimilated aristocracy disappeared by dispossession leaving the lower strata or **gweryn** (common folk) sharing possession of Kernewek with the local clergy.

This process of anglicisation and colonisation was brought to an abrupt halt by the Norman invasion. Many of the Breton followers of the Conqueror, including Brian of Brittany, received Cornish manors and out of 793 manors held by the Count of Mortain, the Conqueror's brother, 248 were in Cornwall. 53 The basis was laid for a long period of special identity between Cornwall and the interests of the crown - at first represented by royal relatives and favourites and then, from

the mid - 1300s, by the consolidation of these Cornish offices and holdings within the Duchy of Cornwall, an appanage created for the monarch's eldest son in 1337.

If not from the very beginning at least within a couple of generations, this interest became focussed on the revenues to be derived from tin. Such commercialising objectives were very much in line with the wider policies of the Norman state which sought to integrate the British economy, primarily as a raw material producer, with the expanding urban economies of the continent. The newly established royal boroughs and ports were all part of the apparatus by which the resulting trade was most effectively channelled and taxed by the crown.

In Cornwall the specific methods adopted for expanding tin production go a long way to explain the exceptional character of Cornwall's economy in the feudal period. — and also, it would seem, the long survival of Celtic culture and speech. Tin production was then conducted almost entirely through the ' streaming 'of alluvial deposits along river valleys. Mining was limited to quickly exhausted surface pits. The whole operation was necessarily small - scale, exploratory and mobile - shifting from one area to another - and mainlyconducted as a seasonal occupation by the peasantry. Unlike wool, therefore, it was hardly susceptible to large scale organisation like that pioneered by the great Cistercian abbeys. Yet, in the totality of English trade, as an export commodity, tin came second only to wool in its potential value. 54

The task facing the royal administration was, therefore, a complex one. Without being able to rely on the coercion of a labour reserve, it somehow had to push Cornwall's peasantry into maximising the time they spent on tin streaming. The method adopted was to subordinate the entire rural economy, including to an extent the interests of its feudal lords, to the objectives of tin production, and to do so through a system of royal taxes and exemptions.

A special court under direct royal jurisdiction through the Duchy, the Stannary Parliament (from Latin **stannum** tin), exempted those engaged in tin production both from taxes and subjection to the feudal courts of local lords. In return, those working tin had to bring all their produce to the Stannary Court for ' coining ' - a process by which the corners were struck off each block and retained by the crown. The crown, through the Stannary Parliament, also reserved the right to pre - empt the actual sale of tin. This made it possible to counteract any attempt by the tin wholesalers, the London merchant pewterers, to depress pricesand hence upset the battery of fiscal incentives by which the peasantry were enticed from their holdings to undertake tin production. 55

The resulting structure, a characteristically feudal mixture of small - scale non - capitalist production, monopolistic merchanting and crown control, seems to have provided relatively effective incentives for expanding peasant production.

From the 1200s to the late 1400s, 500 to 600 tons of tin were coined annually. this was a level as high as that in the early 17th century and was not seriously

outpaced until the later 17th century and the adoption of fully capitalist mining techniques. 56

The effects on the overall rural economy of Cornwall were profound. Estimates put the proportion of family units coming directly within the jurisdiction of the Stannaries as between 10% and 15% at a minimum. 57 Many more would have participated to some extent or other - involved on a part - share basis in the prospecti. g teams that organised themselves among the peasant population. As a result of this and the consequent external source of money income, rents in Cornwall fluctuated not in line with population but with the buoyancy of the tin market. After the Black Death, for instance, when rents fell everywhere else, Cornish rents continued to increase in line with the rising tin market. 58

There were, moreover, striking differences in the forms of land tenure from those of England. On the Duchy manors the typical peasant was neither freeholder nor villein but a leaseholder. Such ' conventionary ' tenants held a seven year lease at a free market rent with no renewal as of right and no hereditary security. Considerable premiums exchanged hands in order to secure leases. At the same time forms of agricultural production demanding wage labour were noticeably underdeveloped. There was very little consolidated demesne farming by landlords and few labour employing, large peasant farmers. 59 Estimates of the proportion of wage labourers based on the muster returns for 1522 reveal only half the proportion found in Devon. 60

Throughout the high middle ages, therefore, The Cornish countryside, with its competitive leasing of peasant holdings, was noticably monetarised. Just as marked, however, was the fact that it was peculiarly inhospitable to any form of production involving the employment of wage labour. The tin working sector, organis ed on a small - scale, cooperative, mainly non - wage basis, provided the reserve occupation, a source of ready cash for the renewal of leases, which soaked up spare labour capacity and Duchy officials exercised themselves to keep things that way. As one might expect in these circumstances, Cornish towns, mainly ports for import and export, while prosperous and developing, did not become centres for outwork and manufacturing production. There was, comparatively speaking, little growth of a gentry stratum made up of consolidating landlords and merchants. Nor were there many of the great aristocratic feudal estates, lay or ecclesiastical, typical of the English Midlands The Duchy officials remained supreme. No higher nobility semi - independent of the crown emerged and the only exceptions were holdings of manors owned by nobles based outside Cornwall like the Courtney Marquis of Exeter executed by Henry VIII. Carew in his **Survey of Cornwall** (1575 - 1600) wrote that Cornwall had none that the queen could call cousin.

Instead, insulated from wider social changes by the peculiar character of tin production, we find a vigorous, rather homogeneous peasantry with a strongly developed internal discipline and elective parochial institutions. Linguistically, this peasantry remained strongly Cornish speaking. As the tin economy expanded,

so the Cornish language and Celtic culture seem to have consolidated themselves again. Subsidy Rolls show that Cornish names became frequent in the towns from the beginning of the 14th century. 61

This period of Cornish cultural strength, with the strange alliance of convenience - political as well as economic - between the crown and Cornish peasant society, provides at least part of the setting for the passage of Celtic folk traditions, including Arthurian material, into European culture.

The Conqueror's Breton minstrels, who spoke a language still virtually identical with Cornish (until about 1100) , mediated between the Normans and the Welsh. 62 The heroic age of the North and its war bands was finally passing into developed feudal society: the warrior had become a knight, direct exploitation was progressively less important as a source of wealth than warfare, and the knight had to reconcile his warfare with Christ by fighting for justice, for honour, for his mistress or for Christendom." 63 In the winter of 1096 - 7, the Duke of Brittany and the Breton nobles, while staying at Bari, were visited by a sculptor and, in all probability between 1099 and 1106, the Arthurian bas - relief was erected over the north door of Modena cathedral . 64

In 1113 monks of Laon travelling with miracle - working relics of the Virgin caused a riot in Bodmin when they scorned the undying king, just as in Britanny if you preached ' in the market places and villages that Arthur the Briton is dead as other men are dead .. hardly will you escape unscathed '. 65 Between 1135 and 1139 Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote his (Latin) **History of the Kings of Britain.** Geoffrey seemingly had Welsh, Breton and Cornish contacts. He was certainly linked with Robert, Earl of Gloucester, who was the half - brother of Reginald, Earl of Cornwall, originator of Tintagel Castle completed c. 1145. 66 His book powerfully recommended the **Matière de Bretagne** to French and Breton Minstrels at the courts of northern France. This influence was further reinforced when Henry of Anjou inherited the throne of England in 1154 as Henry 11. His wife, Eleanor of Acquitaine, came from a court, that of William VIII, Count of Poitou, in which troubadour traditions had already been reinforced by Welsh story telling and ballads from the Welshman Bléheris. 67 Now they became part of a powerful European state stretching from southern France to Ireland. At the centre of this court, Eleanor became the common factor among six personalities vital in the mature development of the Tristan story from the pre - existing early Tristan poem. Thus, though the ramification is still but sketched, the passage was made from ' the meagre annals of a Romano - British chieftan ...; primitive folk tales of uncertain antiquity about which Celtic scholars are not agreed ...; triads little more revealing than **Widsith**; solar, oceanic and vegetation myths once fashionable amongst the learned." 68

In terms of cultural effect, the Norman - Plantagenet monarchy was able to steal an ideological march on the still resentful Saxons by using the legendary history to annex the legitimacy the Celts had brought from Rome. After the colonisation of England and Cornwall, the Normans began the attack on Wales and Britanny

only to discover an inconvenient **Welt Kaiser** who if once king would yet be future king, **rex quondam et rex futurus**. They dealt with him by tracing their monarchy into his times. The white cross of Cornwall, it is said, was carried at Crecy, Agincourt and the Field of Cloth of Gold.

In this period too there is evidence of interest in the Cornish vernacular by the church. Some pagan material as references to the period of post - Roman struggle were included in the **Mamscryvow** (mother texts) of the medieval miracle plays in Kernewek. In **Bewnans Meryasek**, (life of Meriasek), written in the collegiate community of Glasney, Penryn in 1504, it was still seen as relevant to a didactic drama for popular consumption to include references to Cornish kings, The Roman usurpers Massen and Constantine as well as the ancient phrase ' from Tamar to Land's End '. In the same work we see Cornwall and Britanny presented as a sinngle cultural province, the larger part of which, Britanny, had existed as an independent state until its subjection to France sixteen years before in 1488.

So, whatever happened later, up to the 15th century the Cornish maintained a quite distinct national identity which was no less marked than that of the Welsh or Irish. The economy was prosperous. Over a century and a half following the Black Death it was one of the very few areas in England to record an increase in its taxable wealth. 69 The income from tin sustained urban growth and a diversified trade. Churches and public buildings saw substantial 15th century additions. Certain Kernewek words, such as the middle Cornish **gullen** (gull), even became assimilated into the English of western English ports - a sure sign of the expanding mercantile activity of the Cornish — Breton populat - ion 70

Yet, within a century, the Cornish language was dying, its economy in decline, and its society fractured. The great mass revolts of 1497 and 1549, two of the major peasant risings of early modern Britain, had taken place and failed.

We are, therefore, faced with a considerable task of explanation. Certainly some - thing of what happened can be understood as a consequence of the centralising ambitions of the early Tudor state. The ' Prayer Book ' revolt of 1549 was, on the surface at least, sparked off by the reforming zeal of a Protestant government. As the Tudor state attempted to smooth the way for capitalist market forces, to batter down the local feudal jurisdictions and cleanse the backwaters of popish superstition, so conflict was inevitable. But is this enough ? can it fully explain the scale of national eclipse that followed these two revolts - which A. L. Rowse describes as being to Cornwall what the ' 15 and the '45 were to the Highlands' ? 71 Wales was also exposed to a new type of central state intervention but ultimately the Welsh Prayer Book and the Welsh language survived. Neither the Prayer Book nor the Bible had been translated into Kernewek.

Hence it would seem that, in addition, we need to take into account a more fundamental crisis which occurred within **Cornish** society and in particular the

changing social demands of the tin industry. In the same way, that the special demands of feudal tin production served to protect the peasant base of Cornish nationality, so its replacement by capitalist forms seems to have worked the opposite way. Already in the 15th century there were signs of trouble in the industry. Three centuries of intensive working had all but exhausted the alluvial deposits. The wood fuel used for smelting by the peasant tinners was in short supply. To make matters worse, the breakdown of royal authority during the dynastic struggles of the Wars of the Roses had allowed the London wholesalers to depress prices and on occasion, use the indebtedness of the working tinners to compel the advance sale of their produce on adverse terms. 72 Symptomatic of these problems is the evidence produced by Hatcher on falling rent levels. Starting in the west of Cornwall during the second quarter of the 15th century a fall in rent levels spread slowly east - in line with the contracting fortunes of the peasant tinners - as non - agricultural sources of income declined. 73

Parallel with this, however, there are clear indications that sections within the lesser gentry, previously subordinated to the Duchy officials, were applying new mining techniques to the digging of deep, relatively permanent mines. By the early 1500s the Godolphins were importing the services of German mining engineers. Such production, demanding at least a form of wage relationship, was - in essence - incompatible with the old peasant methods, and the increasingenforcement of the Statute of Artificers in the 15th century shows that the tin ' adventurers ', the new capitalist mine operators, were very unhappy about the labour shortages and high wages inevitable in a peasant based society. 74

The resulting conflicts came to their first climax after the accession of Henry VII in 1485. This monarch ruled in close alliance with the merchant intererests in London, and effectively ended the balanced relationship between peasant, crown and wholesaler which had been integral to feudal tin production. Both revolts in 1497 were specifically against the government. The first was a reaction to the tax imposed to finance Henry's Scottish war, a tax seen by tinners as one more infringement of the traditional Stannary exemptions. The rebels were overwhelmingly peasants many of them also tinners, with very few gentry and certainly no gentry leadership. Nonetheless, the rebels revealed a very high level of organisation and cohesion. They marched15,000 strong to the outskirts of London in the hope of making contact with the rebellious peasants of Kent, and they took on government troops in battle. Though defeated and dispersed, the Cornish peasantry rose again just a few months later. This time it was in support of Perkin Warbeck, a bogus Plantagenet pretender, and aimed at the complete overthrow of the Tudor dynasty.

The repression that followed this second revolt was much more thorough, and seems to have involved considerable expropriation and levying of fines as a result of which Cornwall was left with straightened means for a generation. In 1508 forfeited Stannary charters were returned in exchange for a fine of £1,000 and the Charter of Pardons extended the privileges of tinners to owners, merchants,

buyers and others. The Stannary parliament of 1588 divided all tinners into two classes: the working tinners and the 'adventurers' or capitalist mine operators. 75 From then on the 'adventurers' who included leading gentry families took command of the Stannary parliament. The first four decades of the 16th century saw this new leadership grappling, not entirely successfully, with the problem of creating conditions for fully capitalist production, and indeed for most of the 16th century tin production remained lower than in the 15th century. Agricultural enclosure and consolidation produced an increasing stratum of landless labourers. Both the dissolution of the monasteries and the wider religious reformation was given enthusiastic support by its merchant-gentry beneficiaries. Moreover, the Cornish church, with its capacity to act as a rallying ground for the Cornish speaking population, came under close scrutiny. In 1537 Sir William Godolphin, with Cromwell's consent seized Michael Carpyssck, who came from St. Keverne, whence had started the first of the two rebellions in 1497. His crime was to have had a banner made to accompany a petition demanding a restoration of the former holidays of the innumerable celtic saints. As A.L. Rowse wrote, 'when the ruling class was frightened it stuck at nothing'. 76 The Dean of Exeter received a letter in the same year saying that Exeter was 'half afraid of a privy insurrection of Cornishmen' and himself wrote 'this is a perilous country, for God's love let the King's grace look to it in time'. 77 In 1538 the Bishop of Exeter urged the use of Cornish where English was not spoken at the same time as he opposed 'solemn night watchings or drinkings ' when there were deaths. 78

It was in this context of rising resistance to erosion of Cornish national rights that the great revolt of 1549 took place. The immediate issue was the decision to enforce an English instead of Cornish prayer book. The rebel standard was raised at Bodmin, traditional centre of Cornish culture and religion, and rallied to it something over 3,000 armed peasantry as well as many Cornish-speaking lesser clergy, township officers and lesser gentry. 79 Although fuelled by some peasant resentment against enclosure, the rising clearly had much broader national connotations. The story survives that when the rebels beseiged the protestant coty of Exeter, it was observed that 'they do paynt the Image of a cross in a Ragge, with the words **Hoc Signo Vinces**' (by this sign dost thou conquer), a clear reference to the cross of Constantine. 80. After government had lifted the six week seige, it took a further three month campaign to subdue the rebels in Cornwall. Their defeat was followed by a systematic liquidation of the leadership cadres of the Cornish population and a massive redistribution of forfeited land to the protestant gentry.

Connolly wrote that 'Ireland at the same time as she lost her ancient social system, also lost her language'. 81 In Cornwall too, the fierce struggles of the 16th century - part class and part national - provides the background for the extinction of the Cornish language. At the beginning of the 16th century a Venetian ambassador could still describe Cornwall as 'a very wild place... so different in language and custom from Londoners and the rest of England that they are as unintelligible to these last as they are to the Venetians.' 82 By the beginning of the 17th century the Cornish language was more a matter of antiquarian interest. As the old tin industry declined and the land was enclosed, so Cornish working people were increasingly forced into English-speaking enviroments. The landless and the dispossessed looked to the merchant marine and the army. The second and third slaving

voyages of Hawkins came, penultimately, to sheleter at Padstow and Mount's Bay. Troops to assist the subjugation of Ireland in 1574, 1578, 1597, 1599, 1600 and 1601, all embarked through Cornwall and took with them substantial numbers of Cornish recruits. 83 Equally, the new capitalist-organised tin mining seems to have involved English-speaking labour supervision. Norden recorded about 1584 that Cornish was being pushed west of Truro, and since mining was being extended there, we may suspect that its organisation was English-speaking. 84 The old independent self-sufficient bands of peasant tinners were on the way out.

So, to sum up, we can conclude that the coming of capitalist relations in Cornwall not only divided society along class lines but, in contrast with the case in Wales, gave the new ruling class - the merchant gentry and mine operators - a direct interest in rooting out the old way of life. Scawen noted that, in his childhood in the early 17th century, Kernewek was actively ridiculed by the Cornish gentry. 85 For them Cornish custom was seen as inseparable from the previous mode of production and representing a challenge that was both economic and political.

One thing, however is clear. There was never complete victory. The position of the new class remained brittle and uncertain. Their dependence on the Protestant settlement at British level was absolute. The Carews, Killigrews, Tremaynes and all their circle were sympathetic with the Puritan, radical and anti-absolutist faction protected by Leicester and Knollys which was at its height between 1571 and 1584. Its two leaders, Peter and Paul Wentworth, sat for Tregony and Liskeard. The Cornish seats, the number of which was increased 29 to 44 between 1547 and 1584, were represented by members of the Cornish gentry, by an occasional townsman, by Londoners. 86

At local level their lack of any popular mass base was strikingly revealed during the English revolution. Despite expectations at national level that Cornwall, like its M.Ps, would be solidly Parliamentarian the Cornish **gweryn** fought on the side of the king with a persistence and ferocity unmatched anywhere. The Cornish parliamentary committee soon retired from its base, Saltash, in the extreme South-East , into Plymouth, and the **gweryn** were recruited into a highly successful royalist army which remained distinctly Cornish. It had to be bribed to cross the Tamar and the accounts of the royalist paymaster, Sir Francis Basset, note money disbursed when the regiment first marched out of the county. 87 The basic notion was to keep the English army out. After sacrificial glory at Lansdowne, near Bath, with the loss of their leader Grenvile, and again after the successful storming of Bristol in 1643, the survivors expressed, according to Clarendon, ' a peremptory aversion to joining and marching with the king's army. ' 88 Mary Coate observes that ' the attitude of the Cornish to the crown and the Duchy has never been one of passive obedience and their apparent royalism was something more primitive. ' 89 In this they were rather like the peasants of the Vendée in the 1790s in revolt against the capitalist forces there. In 1644 Essex brought a Parliamentary army into what Clarendon calls a ' labyrinth ' of popular hostility. Essex left by sea after terms. His cavalry broke through inefficient generalship of Goring and his retreating infrantry were cruelly harried by the peasantry. Only in the spring of 1646 was some sort of settlement achieved, and even then by using the same kind of appeal as the royalists.

Fairfax's army was accompanied by Hugh Peters the Cornish puritan and regicide - soon - to - be. At Bodmin he was able to inflame the peasantry by exposing plans, discovered on a royalist vessel at Padstow, to bring 6000 Irish catholics to Cornwall. Later he preached to Parliament that ' Cornwall is yours without blood ' asking on behalf of Cornwall and the whole country that the disabled, the widows and the orphans should be cared for and beggars and debtors not forgotten 90 The royalist army concluded the Treaty of Tresillian Bridge on March 12th and the aged Sir John Arundell surrendered Pendennis Castle with honours on the 16th of August 1646. The Cornish army was itself undefeated but the people and their language were left in the shadow of royalist defeat.

5. Capitalist Cornwall : 1600 onwards

In the next fifty years the linguistic heartland was eroded to a coastal fishing and mining strip, along Mount's Bay and linking the Land's End and Lizard peninsulas. This was reduced to the south coasts of each peninsula by the early 18th century. Perhaps this diminishing fringe of land was really the edge of a community of work on the sea where small - scale, co - operative working relationships remained.

Some usage of written Cornish persisted even after the end of the medieval church and its preservation of manuscript Cornish at Glasny College. From 1660 into the 18th century a group of literate middle class people, none of them intellectual giants, made it their hobby. They left mainly incomplete works which form an interesting body of early modern Cornish writing. In 1678 the last sermon in Cornish was preached at Landewednack in the Lizard and in the same year Lord Chief Justice Sir Francis North, in his chambers after the Launceston Assizes, reproached some of the local gentry for the loss and decay of their language. William Scawen felt prompted by North to his own endevours. John Keigwin 1641 - 1716, was probably the greatest of the group referred to and also the last person whose knowledge of the traditional Cornish was profound. He was the translator, in 1682, of **Mount Calvary** or the Passion Poem (**Pascon Agan Arluth**) - a fifteenth century poem - and of **Gwreans an Bys** (Creation of the World) in 1691. 91 In 1700 the Welshman Edward Lhuyd spent four months in Cornwall with three assistants collecting material for his massive comparative study of the Celtic languages. He was in direct contact with Keigwin, Gwavas, Tonkin, Nicholas Boson and others, and had a letter of introduction from Sir Jonathan Trelawney, Bishop of Exeter and one of the seven Bishops in 1688. 92

In its failure to save the Cornish language this group could have been hampered by its class separation from the mass of Cornish speakers,to whom it may have behaved too passively. The movement from Cornish into English is symbolised by a 49 - page Cornish - English vocabulary in Dr. William Borlase's **Antiquities Historical and Monumental of the County of Cornwall,** published in 1770, and by the Cornish - English glossary of mining words in Dr. Pryce's **Mineralogia Cornubiensis**, published in 1772. In 1790, Pryce's **Archaeologica Cornu - Brittanica** contained, amongst other related items, Lhuyd's Cornish grammar and Tonkin's long Cornish vocabulary. Borlase had corresponded with Tonkin, but he left no evidence that he ever went the short distance from his home at Castle Horneck to hear some of the last speech in Cornish at Mousehole.

With hi own valuable 18th century annotations added, Thomas Tonkin in 1723 republished **The Survey of Cornwall** (written by Richard Carew between 1575 and 1600)and this, with the books of Borlase and Pryce, made a splendid beginning of the representation of Cornwall to the Cornish. Borlase's great work on antiquities, the fruit of decades of study, was the first systematic treatment of Cornish history, the first to display systematic field work and still the only source from which modern scholars can trace antiquities since destroyed. No boubt we can recognise here part of Cornwalls share in the Enlightenment which awakened intellectual life all over Europe. Davies Gilbert (1767 - 1838) who occupied the office of high sheriff in 1791 - 2, throughout much of his life linked technologists and academics in Cornwall and England. The sentiments of this man on the ethnic language of Cornwall as expressed in the introduction to his version of **Pascon agan Arluth** are worth quoting because they come from a person prepared to perform the academic exercise of translation.

" No one more sincerely rejoices, than does the editor of this ancient mystery, that the Cornish dialect of Celtic or Gaelic language has ceased altogether from being used by the inhabitants of Cornwall; whatever may have been its degree of intrinsic excellence: experience amply demonstrating that no infliction on a province is equally severe or irremediable, as the separation of distinct speech from a great and enlightened nation, of which it forms a part. A separation closing against it most of the avenues to knowledge and wholly intercepting that course of rapid improvement which eminently distinguishes the present age from all other periods in the history of man. " 93

Meanwhile, the working people, losing the last practical hold of their language, were preoccupied with the struggle for existence being securely fastened on them by developing capitalism.

The average yearly coinage of tin under Charles 1 was less than the 550 tons yearly average under Elizabeth but it rose sharply after the restoration to a yearly average of 1400 tons up to the reign of Queen Anne. It was 2143 tons in 1710, and averaged 1443 tons in the 1740s. 94 In the early 18th century roughly 15000 people, men women and children, were employed in tin working and in all mning. It is likely that the living conditions of one third of the inhabitants of Cornwall were affected to a greater or lesser degree, directly or indirectly, by the fortunes of the mines. 95 This expansion was largely possible because of the introduction of coal smelting in the 1690s and steam - driven pumping engines in the years from 1710 onwards. Although a fringe of small - scale tin workings always survived, these developments placed the industry fully in the hands of capitalist mine operators and smelters. Copper mining, organised on a capitalist bsaia from the beginnig, also began in the early 18th century, and by the 1750s the value of its output was exceeding that of tin. From then, until its collapse in the face of foreign competition in the 1860s, copper remained the dominant force within the Cornish economy.

Seemingly, therefore, Cornwall was among those areas of the British Isles which an early transition to industrial capitalism. Already by the end of the 18th centurya substantial majority of its population gained the bulk of their livelihood from non - agrarian occupations. Yet there also remained crucial differ -

ences. Wage relations, in a formal sense, never fully crystallised - at least in the leading sectors of the economy. In tin mining labour organisation continued on a co - operative and group basis not unlike that in the old feudal industry. Groups of miners led by a ' tributer ' would bid for particular seams, and negotiate a certain division of output, in advance, with the mine operator.Basically, such ' tributing ' could not obliterate the drastic inequality of capital and labour but it certainly went beyond the simple subcontracting found in other mining areas, and gave the working miners, depending on the luck of the lode, differing propor - tions of the value obtained. By the early 18th century tribute work was sufficiently well - entrenched as a labour practice to transfer itself to the new copper industry and dominate its industrial relations throughout the 19th century. Indeed, Rowe, in his **Cornwall in the Age of the Industrial Revolution** argues that its dominance within the leading sectors of the Cornish economy helps explain the poor developmnet of other industries, notably copper smelting which demanded a more direct employer control of labour. Superficially, tut - work and tribute agreements suggested that the labourer was on equal terms with the adventurer with whom he contracted to do a certain amount of work: labouring in copper - smelting works was a species of ' wage slavery ' to which the mining population of Cornwall had not been accustomed. 96

How this form of organisation came in Cornwall alone to have so dominant a position remains largely unexplored but remembering the national and class content of the struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and also that one major issue was control of the tin industry it would seem reasonable to suggest that it did reflect a continuing defence, partly national in character, of the traditional rights of working people. The fact that this defence was in form, if not in content, partially successful would also seem to suggest the continuing vigour and cohesion of national conciousness at this level.

However, while it might well be claimed that among the common people, the **gweryn**, Cornish national culture did assist the resistance to capitalist forces, it is also clear that there were negative consequences.

The lack of any straightforward wage relationship for workers in the leading sectors of the Cornish economy meant that labour organisation was stunted. No strike activity has been recorded for the copper industry till 1831. 97 Despite some attempts to stop underbidding at auctions for tribute pitches. Far more typical of protest against economic hardship was action on food supplies. Regularly throughout the 18th century there were highly organised attempts, usually led by miners, to compel sales at lower prices and to stop the export of grain. More significant still, such action continued into the 19th century long after it had been discontinued in England. During the economic crises of the 1830s and the 1840s popular anger found its expression in actions against corn merchants. In May 1847 miners and quarry workers compelled the lowering of prices and opening of warehouses at Wadebridge, and after their success such action spread to Callington, Launceston, Helston, Penzance, St. Austell and the Camborne - Redruth area - in all instances led by miners. Chartism spread to some extent and the Northern Star printed ' intelligence ' from Truro, Redruth, Hayle and Penzance. William Lovett, one of the leaders of Chartism in Britain was born in Newlyn where he worked for some time as a rope maker. Nevertheless Cornwall was hardly a stronghold of Chartism despite its heavily industrial population. 98

Parallel with this retarded development of trade union and labour organisation went the popular strength of Methodism. It is difficult to claim that Methodism was somehow particularly appropriate to Cornwall since its founders (and subsequent propagators) were notably hostile to manifestations of Cornish national culture. In 1743 the Wesleys had been outraged by thehumour of the drolls and mummers' plays. They also disliked the village feasts and festivals on Celtic saints' days and the folk culture of the **gweryn.**

As elsewhere, it seems likely that Methodism was initially used to open up a channel of communication between the middle class and working people. The class composition of Methodist support has been analysed as ' mainly ' miners (anyone from ordinary miner to Cap'n), farmers (possibly with farm workers), shopkeepers, tradesmen, fishermen; often ' products of the new society of the industrial revolution' - with the trustees being ' mainly middle class people '. 99 The mass strength of this religion probably stemmed from the weakness of radical and trade union organisation (there was generally an inverse relation between the two in the early 19th century), and it is also likely that for the common people it was a field of qualitatively different self - expression when work was limiting other opportunities.

Be that as it may, one consequence of this religious domination was the speedy erosion of any open or developed expression of Cornish folk culture. By the 1800s the ' mummers ' plays were a thing of the past - for a while the drolls continued and Tom the Tinker, a Lelant miner, could droll away three or four winter evenings with the minutest details of the giants castle in ancestral words. 100 By 1869 the Rev, C. Honor could refer only to the ' wonderful stories ' told by miners and fishermen until recently. 101 By then other factors were also coming into play. The 1870 Education Act, in many ways welcome, represented a culturally elitist perspective which is recorded all over Celtic Britain as ' a murder machine ' for native language and culture, and its operation in Cornwall made everything Cornish seem ' rough, ready and rude '. 102

Still more drastic in its consequences was the collapse of the copper industry itself in the 1860s and 1870s.

At its peak in the 1850s there were 300 mines at work in Cornwall employing, together with dependent trades, 50,000 people - just under one seventh of the population. 103 In the 1830s Cornwall had been producing 53% of the world's copper, and in the previous decades there had been development of local cultural and scientific centres in Truro, Falmouth and Penzance, and ultimately the world – famous School of Metalliferous Mining in Camborne. Now, however, competition with American mines brought a steady and catastrophic collapse. Production dropped from 121,000 tons in the 1850s to 90,000 tons in the 1860s and 36,000 tons in the 1870s.

In conditions of acute hardship a mass emigration began. In 1875 10,576 left for Australia alone. 104 Thousands also emigrated to America and later in the 1880s and 1890s to the mining areas of South Africa. These working people took with them much of the oral tradition of Cornish folk lore. The main collection of Cornish cur'ls (carols) developed by working class composers in the 1860s and 1870s was brought home from abroad by an old Cornishman and discovered on his death. It was published as the Woolcock collection in 1927. 105 It is note -

worthy that these Cornish emigrant miners, carrying with them proud traditions of independent work practices, became militant trade unionists as soon as they were thrust into full wage relationships abroad. One wage - cutting mine owner in Australia wrotein 1874 after precipitating a strike among his Cornish miners : ' we can be damned thankful that women don't usually unite for a common purpose. Those Cornish Jennies up at Moonta showed us what can happen if they do.' 106 (So much for the older and rather academic nationalists who gave some currency to the idea that Cousin Jack and Cousin Jenny were passive and seemed to enjoy being trodden on.). Richard Trevellick (1830 - 1895), a native of St. Mary's in Scillonia, became a major figure in the development of the trade union movement internationally. While in Australia in 1856 he helped lead the agitation for an eight hour day. In Detroit in 1861 he became president of the Ship Carpenters and Caulkers Union and first president of Detroit Trades Assembly. In 1866 he was one of the promoters of America's first really representative trade union federation, the National Labour Union, and was elected in 1869 to represent it at the first congress of the International Working Men's Association. 107

By then, in the mid and later sixties, labour militancy was at last beginning to itself felt in Cornwall. As copper prices tumbled and as the remaining mine operators used unemployment to bid up the prices of pitches, so the miners began to organise themselves. In February of 1866 a Miners Mutual Benefit Association was established, mainly in the Eastern parts of the copper mining areas, with the object of using industrial action to halt the upward rise in the price of pitches. Some idea can be gained of the relative poverty of the Cornish miners from their immediate aim : to secure a minimum wage of £1 a week. Almost immediately after the Association's foundation the mine operators adopted a policy of refusing to employ its members, and a bitter strike began, involving upwards of 2,000 miners, and lasting two months before its defeat. 108

This outcome was probably inevitable in view of the weak traditions of labour solidarity and tha ability of the employers to draw in blacklegs from other sectors of the mines. Unfortunately, however, the complete collapse of the copper industry in the following fifteen years destroyed any opportunity for developing union organisation. So, in just those years when stable labour movements began to crystallise, economically and politically, in English industrial areas, Cornwall remained without union organisation - despite its far more traumatic experience of deprivation and impoverishment.

At this turning point, therefore, it is useful to review what has been said so far about the impact of Capitalism in Cornwall. Its origins are fairly clear. Based on mineral extraction, developing very early and springing from **inside** Cornish society itself, the new capitalist class was forced to assimilate its own struggle for capital accumulation to the larger creation and defence of a centralised, non - feudal kingdom. In doing so it struck a fatal blow at the Cornish language. Equally, because it developed early, because it placed itself in conflict with the indigenous national traditions and because of its weak social base (demonstrated forcibly in the 1640s) it seems to have been compelled to accept relations with its workforce which were in certain ways pre - capitalist. These work practices, exemplified in ' tributing ', ultimately had the negative effect of inhibiting the

development of full labour solidarity. At the same time, however, they did sustain some elements of peasant collectivity and co - operation, and, stemming from the long drawn out struggle between the new capitalist methods and the old political economy of the independent working tinner, also represented a traditional opposition to concentrated capitalist wealth and hence at least held a potent - tiality for class opposition to the capitalist system.

It is in this context that it is possible to formulate a meaning for that crucial concept of the Cornish nation in the modern period, the **gweryn**, the unpropertied or little propertied inheritors of the tradition of the former possessors of the Cornish language, **Kernewek**. In an area disguised as an English county, the **gwerynsignify** the masses linked ethnically with a non - English tradition, spanning from pre - feudalism through a vast space of time to contemporary capitalism, able to assimilate the children and grand - children of immigrants, if there is no family opposition, but weakening rapidly in the speedily anglicised upper levels of the class spectrum. Today the working class, the fishermen and the small farmers are the definitive reservoir of the Cornish identity.

Hence any assessment of the organised movement for the survival of an intrinsically Cornish Cornwall, which is our final task here, must depend upon its relation with this real existing base. At the centre of the national question is the issue: whether, in the era of monopoly capitalism when concentrations of wealth at international level threaten Cornwall with still more grievous desolation, particular movements draw upon - or deny - this long tradition of indigenous resistance, of sustaining co-operative and non-capitalist forms of organisation, rooted in the everyday life of the working people. This is an issue for nationalism and for socialism. But socialism alone is capable of discovering a form of reconciliation of all the working people of Cornwall on the basis of mutual understanding born of common class struggle.

The following paragraphs, except the final ones, outline the Cornish movement which has arisen during the last century and a quarter. It is called **Dasserghyans** and can conveniently be divided into three phases; from the 1850s to World War 1; the inter-war period; and the years since World War 2.

The first phase was originally philological, concerned with a scientific study and reconstruction of the language. J.C. Zeuss, who published his **Grammatica Celtica** in 1853, clarified the position of Cornish among the Celtic languages. Edwin Norris, who in 1859 published the **Ancient Cornish Drama** (which included a sketch of Cornish grammar) and the text, with translation, of the medieval **Ordinalia**, opened the gate to the study of Cornish. Later, others such as Robert Williams (a Welshman), the Rev Lach-Szyrma and Henry Jenner took these studies further. We can now discern some relationship between Kernewek and the then existing ethnic variety of English, which we will call Anglo-Cornish, of which a considerable amount survives in the literature of Methodist preaching. The people of the Dasserghyans had sometimes a rather condescending patronage of Anglo-Cornish.

However, it is also clear that this first phase did have ideological overtones and was perhaps particularly identified with the Anglican Church, and its drive to recover a mass base from the Methodists. Robert Stephen Hawker, vicar of Morwenstow 1834-75, an early representative of the Oxford movement and a

death-bed adherent to Catholicism, wrote the song commonly called 'Tralawney' and possessed a copy of Gilbert's 1827 edition of **Pascon Agan Arluth**. Philpotts, Bishop of Exeter 1831-1869, another high churchman, worked for the re-creation of a Cornish see. Benson, later Archbishop of Canterbury, and first Bishop of Truro in 1877, was an active campaigner against Methodism, and on his perpetual visitations to even the most remote parishes told people about their church, patron saint and local history. 109

Henry Jenner (1848-1934), in many ways the founder of modern Cornish, was the most pronounced exponent of this elitist and clerical trend. Jenner and his followers cultivated feudal royalist politics at the same time as publishing much authentic Cornish material. 110 He appeared to have no interest in Brittany in the first few decades of his adult life, thereby missing any opportunity to support the volunteer army raised by Breton republican interests against the Prussians in 1870-1, and when he opened links with Breton organisations in the early 1900s, the trend in Breton politics had become Catholic Monarchist, which accorded with his political tastes.

During the second phase of **Dasserghyans**, in the inter - war period, Jenner still remained the central figure until his death. His contact with the Welsh Gorsedd led after more than two decades to the founding of Gorseth Kernow in 1928. Other organisations to come into existence were the Old Cornwall Societies and the Cornish Wrestling Association. **Tyr ha Tavas** (Land and Language) appeared in 1933 and was the periodical of a short lived nationalist political organisation.

After the Second World War **Mebyon Kernow** (Sons of Cornwall) was unofficially considered in 1950 and formed in 1951 mainly by Cornish language bards of Gorseth Kernow, to become the oldest enduring organisation (despite two right-wing splinters, one still extant) to advance the demand for Cornish self-government.

After 1962 it started to move beyond a simple list of linguistic, cultural, preservationist and employment demands to campaign on social issues. Its membership expanded from 100 to two or three thousand by 1969. It was organised in many branches and was able to win a number of council seats. In 1962 it promoted the formation of a Kernow branch of the Celtic League, and from 1962 to 1971 campaigned against the reduction of rail services. In 1964-5 it made the call for a Cornish university and for educating children in their Cornish language. In 1972 Cornwall County Council and Exeter University established the Institute of Cornish Studies and in 1978 Cornish was adopted as an alternative second language in two secondary schools after demands by sixth forms. The Gorseth's **Kesva an Tavas Kernewek** (Cornish Language Board) has promoted the general use of Kernewek, which is now finding conversational expression and adoption by folk and pop singers (since 1972 Cornwall has usually been represented at the Killarney Pan-Celtic Festival). In August 1980 the **Western Morning News** reported that, at the annual international Celtic Congress in Dublin, one of the two Cornish members who addressed the congress in Cornish used a tape recording of a three year old Redruth child 'one of several children being raised to speak Cornish as the family language'.

However, the problem of nationalism's relation with the working class persists. In a period when Cornwall's unemployment rivals that of South Wales and the West

of Scotland, and when big business firmly grips what remains of Cornwall's economy in china clay, mining and engineering, the nationalist groups do not often mention monopoly and certainly do not come to grips with it. They are loud about employment and housing for the Cornish but the demand for basic social and economic rights for people in Cornwall remains muted or ambiguous. On occasion some individual nationalists associate with misdirected activity of the working class against its own interest - such as the march of 2,000 clay workers through St Austell (led by management) to protest against the 1972 dock strike.

Hence the importance for socialists and the labour movement to relate Cornwall's real, existing national consciousness with the urgent tasks of defending the economic and social basis of life in Cornwall. It is necessary to demonstrate that it is the capitalist system itself which still today menaces the national culture of the approximately quarter million people of Cornish origin in Cornwall, and correspondingly that the future of all people in Cornwall depends upon securing the reality of democratic control over economic, social and cultural life which socialism alone can bring. Saving the Cornish nation is not therefore a mere empty promise to do something when socialism has been built but part of the present and continuing struggle.

In approaching the national question in this way, the first step must be to recognise, concretely and specifically, what has been progressive in Cornwall's national tradition, and thus to reveal, for all the people of Cornwall, a basis of common struggle, in unity with progressive forces everywhere, against an economic system which from its very beginning has attacked the Cornish identity and culture. We are therefore brought back to James Connolly's concept of the political ' Reconquest ' of his own nation, and for a progressive and complete popular recovery of every aspect of its life on the basis of socialism. 111 The primitive communism, which the Saxons and Normans found and attacked, was not defended in vain, and indeed today can be drawn upon by the working class in its struggle for socialist revolution in these islands.

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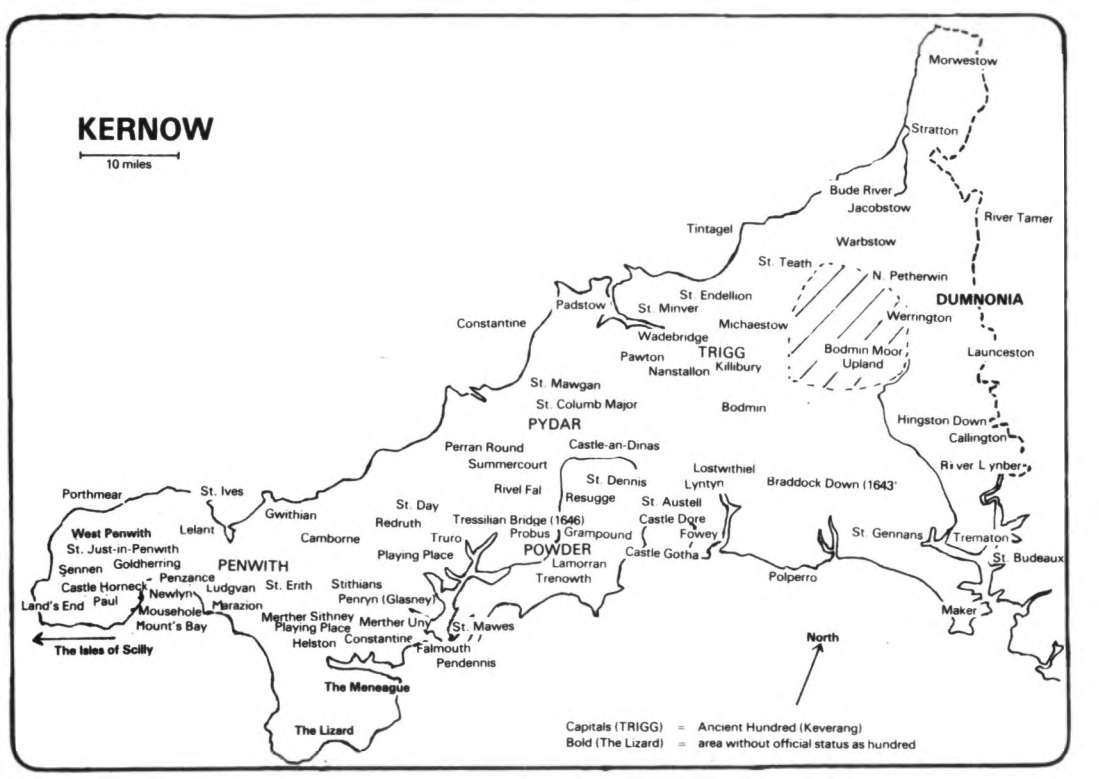
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COMMITTEE NOTES

Finances and publications

The publication of *Our History 74*, the first issue for more than a year, has been made possible by the generosity of friends of the Group who have contributed to a reserve fund to meet printing bills. The debts which have hampered all our activities still prevent production of *Our History Journal 7*.

Activities

The first meetings since the autumn of 1979 have taken place, in London, in March and May of this year. There are three meetings arranged for the remainder of the year, two of them in London but the third in Bristol which we hope will be of interest to members in South Wales and the West of England.

Friday 10th July, 7.30, in London

Marc Kopman from the Party History Workgroup of the Institute for Political and Social Research (IPSO) of the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) is coming to London and will give a talk specially prepared for the Group about their work:

'The Communist Party of the Netherlands looks at its own history'

Venue: University of London Union, Malet Street, W.C. 1.
(Nearest Underground: Goodge Street)

The CPN's programme of work on Party history is based on exciting and original concepts, and the talk is highly recommended. The meeting is jointly organised with the Communist University of London 1981; admission is free.

Saturday 12th September 1981, 11 to 4, in Bristol

11 Angela Tuckett on 'The People's Theatre Movement in Bristol 1930-1945'

2 Gwyn Williams on 'The Infidel Working Class 1790-1830. Free Thought and the Formation of the British Working Class'

Venue: West of England District premises, 10 Lawford Street.

Saturday 21st November 1981, 2.15, in London

Allan Merson, one of the most longstanding members of the Group, will speak on:

'The German Communist Party and the Anti-Fascist Resistance in the Third Reich'

Venue: Room 308, Polytechnic of Central London, 35 Marylebone Road, N.W. 1
(Nearest Underground: Baker Street)

Allan Merson is preparing a manuscript on this subject, with particular reference to North-Rhine-Westphalia, for a future *Our History*.

Annual General Meeting 1981

Date: Saturday 26th September, from 11 to 5

Venue: Marx House Lecture Hall, 37a Clerkenwell Green, London E.C. 1
(Nearest Underground: Farringdon)

Geoff Ferres
Secretary
29. 6. 1981